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Viewing cable 07OSLO1161, NORWAY'S DEFENSE POLICY AT A CROSSROADS: CLARITY

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Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#07OSLO1161**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07OSLO1161	2007-12-18 13:17	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Oslo

Appears in these articles:

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6495
INFO RUEHXP/ALL NATO POST COLLECTIVE
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 7964
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RUEHNY/ODC OSLO NO
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 001161

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2017

TAGS: MARR MASS MCAP PREL PINR PINS PGOV NO

SUBJECT: NORWAY'S DEFENSE POLICY AT A CROSSROADS: CLARITY
FROM USG IS KEY

REF: A. OSLO 1093
 1B. OSLO 988
 1C. OSLO 382
 1D. OSLO 184

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kevin M. Johnson
for reasons 1.4 b and d

Summary

11. (SBU) Norway is undergoing a philosophical, bureaucratic and public debate on what its defense policy, obligations and needs will be for the next five to ten years. The outcome will have significant implications for Norway's ability to fulfill NATO obligations as well as its ability to cope with the potential of increased military threats in the Arctic. An additional factor in the debate is increased official interest in Nordic defense cooperation, with a particular focus on Sweden. The planned purchase of 48 new fighter aircraft (relevant to the Joint Strike Fighter program), and a decision on a costly fast patrol boat program top procurement concerns. As the debate intensifies, 2008 will be a decisive year for Norway's defense capabilities and strategy. It is vital that the USG speak and act clearly and at senior levels when Norway is an outlier on key issues. Norway is changing and USG engagement is key to avoid further drift. End Summary

What? Soldiers Actually Shoot?

12. (SBU) Background to this debate includes a government which rhetorically affirms NATO as Norway's primary security provider but which is at heart skeptical of the use of military power in all but the most benign ways, tempted by the idea of closer Nordic defense cooperation and includes an anti-NATO party, the Socialist Left (SV) as a member of the governing coalition. The vigorous internal governmental debate over Norway's contributions to ISAF, as well as repeated public negative comments concerning NATO and U.S. missile defense plans are illustrative of the general impulse of this government (see reftels for details).

13. (SBU) The deaths of two Norwegian soldiers in Afghanistan over the past year have forced the government to finally publicly explain why Norway is in Afghanistan. Public support for Norwegian deployment to Afghanistan is roughly 50% but in large segments of society, and certainly in SV, there is a strong belief that military force creates rather than solves problems and that the military should be used only for UN mandated peacekeeping missions. This view is particularly prevalent among younger Norwegians who have no direct memories of U.S. assistance during the Cold War or WWII. This has led the GON to keep silent about Afghanistan or to stress the development side only, implying that &others8 do force, and Norway does reconstruction.

Flat Budgets

14. (C) Governmental skepticism of defense has been reflected in flat budgets for the last five years, meaning in real

terms, decreases in funding. This at a time when Norway accumulated a vast 380 billion dollar surplus in its oil fund. An additional factor is that the Minister of Defense, Anne-Grete Strom Erichsen, is one of the weakest cabinet members. She is a former Mayor of Bergen with no previous defense experience and is completely overshadowed in intergovernmental debates by the strong personalities of the Foreign Minister (Jonas Gahr Stoere), the Finance Minister (Kristin Halvorsen, head of SV) and the Development and Environmental Minister (Erik Solheim also SV).

Norway's Future Defense Capabilities Limited

15. (C) In contrast to the Minister, the Norwegian CHOD, General Sverre Diesen is very capable and well respected and has been fighting hard to protect Norwegian defense capabilities, to restructure the military away from a static territorial defense to a more expeditionary force and to make the political case for the need for the military and for increased resources for the MOD. He headed the MOD Defense Study (released recently along with a concurrent study conducted by largely civilian defense experts). The studies

largely concurred with his assessments and judged future security threats against Norway to be not invasion but an isolated and limited use of force against Norwegian interests, likely to be in the Arctic. In a speech on November 26, Diesen specified further, saying that increased Russian military activity in the Arctic could lead to such a conflict or to the use of military power to force the Norwegian government to change its policy on a controversial issue. Diesen stated further that in such a situation Norway would need to have the capability to cope without NATO support. The Studies also called for increased cooperation with Sweden and other countries to save money on equipment purchases, training and exercises. (Note: MOD claims that the fighter purchase is explicitly excluded from equipment coordination with Sweden). Newspaper editorials called the Studies brutally honest and compared the current funding levels (in terms of GDP) to defense spending in the 1930s, which was historically low and left Norway ill prepared to deal with the German invasion in April 1940.

16. (C) The Studies reached the same conclusions on the impact of current funding, namely that a continued flat defense budget will require cuts in some equipment purchases, require international cooperation to save money, the closure of many bases and the consolidation of Norway's joint headquarters, and create limitations on the effectiveness of the military both in international operations and in Norway. The civilian defense study stated that without increases in the budget Norway will be hard pressed to defend its interest in the Arctic region, will be unable to respond to crises in Norway if parts of the military are engaged in international operations and will find it difficult to justify the purchases of frigates, fast patrol boats or fighter aircraft that currently are planned or under consideration. The studies called for the purchase of new fighter aircraft and frigates but recommended canceling the fast patrol boat program. In recent years only the Coast Guard has seen increases in budget and staffing. This trend would continue with the exception of an increase in professional soldiers in the army (a decrease in overall number would continue). However, the funding increases for the Coast Guard have largely been to increase capabilities for policing fisheries and have very limited military application.

Impacting NATO's Joint Warfare Center

17. (C) The Studies recommended relocating the current Norwegian joint headquarters in Jatta near Stavanger (co-located with NATO's Joint Warfare Center) to Bodø, possibly leaving the Joint Warfare Center without sufficient support, the closure of all but two naval bases and five air bases and the reduction of the Home Guard. (Comment: Relocation of the Norwegian HQ in Jatta could have a significant impact on the Joint Warfare Center as the Norwegians currently provide much of the logistical support. The Norwegian MOD has promised to maintain the current level of support).

Tough Choices and Russian Behaviour

¶8. (C) By presenting such a stark picture, Diesen appears to be calling the GON's bluff, saying in effect, if you continue to give us insufficient support, this is what you will get, a military without capabilities either to defend Norway or to participate in international operations. It remains to be seen how the GON will react to the Studies or what revisions the Minister of Defense and Parliament will make during their review and the subsequent debate on this issue. The multimillion dollar purchase of six fast patrol boats seems likely to be a hot political topic as the boats are made in Norway and large amounts of money have already been spent on this project. Recently, media reports indicated that the head of the Navy reversed his earlier agreement with the Defense Study and is now saying that Norway needs to keep its MTB fleet. Recent Russian aircraft carrier activity off Norway's coast caused FM Stoere to joke at a meeting attended by the Ambassador that &Russia is helping us refute those who question our need for fighter aircraft.⁸ We are watching how increased Russian activity affects defense policy and budget debates.

Nordic Defense: Supplement or Substitute for NATO?

¶9. (C) Unlike the debate over budgets and capabilities, interest in increased defense cooperation with Sweden and Finland commands broad agreement between the GON and MOD. Along with the favorable mention of this concept in the Defense Studies, Diesen and the Swedish CHOD, Hakan Syren, meet regularly and have called for closer cooperation in speeches in the fall of 2006. Late this summer they wrote joint editorials in leading Norwegian and Swedish papers calling for increased formal cooperation in defense issues. This cooperation would entail joint procurement, training, exercises and deployments on international operations. A recent proposal by an influential advisory body for a change in Swedish defense policy, in which Sweden stated that it would not be passive in the case of a catastrophe or attack on EU or Nordic members, caused jubilant headlines in Norway which stated that Sweden will defend Norway. Norway's Deputy Defense Minister welcomed the statement and said that Norway would reciprocate. The enthusiastic welcome of the announcement demonstrates the significant public and official appetite for cooperation with Sweden.

¶10. (C) On the MFA side, the Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish Foreign Ministers have begun regular meetings, the most recent held in Bodø (the location of Norway's Northern command center) on October 10. (Note: The GON briefed that Russian bombers flying just outside Norwegian air space simulated what appeared to be a cruise missile attack on Bodø the day of the Nordic Minister's meeting.) Increased defense cooperation with Sweden is welcome by the GON as it sees Sweden and Finland as countries with experience in the North (read with Russia) who share the same rough political ideology. In particular SV strongly supports closer defense ties to Sweden, which in their view could weaken NATO ties. On the opposite side of the political spectrum the conservative Progress Party also welcomes increased ties with Sweden based on the belief that security cooperation would strengthen Norway's territorial defense. It is clear that relations with Russia form a substantial rationale for increased Nordic cooperation along with the publicly stated goal of increased savings on military purchases. MFA Political Director Kai Eide tells us increased Nordic cooperation is easier now because Sweden and Finland are close partners with NATO, arguing that this initiative brings others closer to NATO rather than drawing Norway away.

¶11. (C) Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere has made repeated speeches welcoming increased Nordic cooperation and has entertained several high- level Swedish industry delegations. In past public comments Stoere took pains to state that NATO remains the anchor of Norway's security. More recently he has spoken of the unique potential for Nordic defense cooperation, calling great power objections relics of

history. In a recent December conference Stoere stated that the GON sees NATO as a strategic &hedge8. According to Stoere,s and Diesen,s public comments, Norway would like to develop, in cooperation with Sweden and Finland, joint participation in international operations, joint procurement of increasingly expensive military equipment, and joint work to increase the focus on northern issues in NATO, the UN and the EU. There has been less mention of cooperation with fellow NATO allies Denmark and Iceland, who would be perhaps more natural partners in the Arctic, but lack Sweden and Finland's expertise and long experience with Russia.

¶12. (C) In private conversations with the embassy, MFA Political Director Kai Eide stated that Norway,s interest in Nordic Defense Cooperation is to encourage others to participate in joint operations in Afghanistan. Eide also stated that Finland is more interested in broad defense cooperation than in joint operations. He mentioned that Russian embassies in the region have expressed concern that the Nordic initiative is aimed at them. Other Embassy contacts have reported that they heard Eide mention privately that the GON,s interest in increasing contacts with Sweden and Finland is to somehow take advantage of those countries, knowledge of Russia and access to the Russian economy.

Return to the Sagas: Norwegian Defense of Iceland?

¶13. (U) After the U.S. withdrew its presence at the Keflavik airbase, the Icelanders asked Norway and other NATO allies for help in providing air surveillance. Norway was willing to cooperate and signed a security agreement with Iceland committing them to hold joint exercises on Iceland annually

and to help monitor the busy sea-lanes off Iceland,s coast. The first joint exercise under this new agreement, named Northern Viking, was held this year and included U.S., Norwegian, and Danish forces. Despite some Icelandic claims that Norway has now taken over responsibility for the defense of Iceland, the Norwegian agreement was very clear in restricting its role with Iceland to peacetime operations, including joint exercises and training and periodic visits by Norwegian forces to Iceland. It specifically does not include security guarantees or basing arrangements.

Implications for the Joint Strike Fighter

¶14. (C) Any discussion of closer Norwegian-Swedish defense industry cooperation inevitably brings up the ongoing Swedish campaign to sell the Gripen fighter to Norway. Norway is considering the purchase of Gripen, Eurofighter or the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). Sweden has conducted an aggressive marketing campaign, promising a wide range of industrial cooperation and dominating the media coverage of the fighter competition. The Embassy has been concerned that the Swedish effort is intended to change the rules of the competition away from a discussion of the needs of the Norwegian Air Force to one over the desirability of closer defense and industrial cooperation with Sweden. The MOD assures us that their recommendation on which fighter to purchase will be based on a competition among all three competitors in which the planes, abilities, the industrial compensation package and the needs of the Air Force are the primary factors. Diesen has publicly stated (and others have privately claimed) that the fighter competition is separate from his proposals to increase cooperation on defense procurement with Sweden. Despite these statements many in Parliament and the government will be eager to push the debate towards a discussion of a closer relationship with Sweden vs. a closer relationship with the United States. This debate has already begun in the media with political cartoonists and editorial writers enjoying the chance to cast a technical debate over fighter planes into a debate over strategic orientation.

Conclusion: Looking for Security and Ideological Comfort

¶15. (C) Comment: FM Stoere realizes the need for continued close security ties to NATO and the U.S. but at the same time is uncomfortable with the direction of U.S. and NATO security policy. His evolving public comments indicate the GON is not

looking to replace NATO but seeks additional partners in security which are a better ideological match with the GON and can balance the U.S. heavy NATO alliance. One example is Norway's increased defense ties with the EU and its participation in the EU Nordic Battle Group, despite being a non-EU member. Cooperation with Sweden and Finland offers both the possibility of savings on equipment purchases and the chance to work with likeminded nations who prioritize UN involvement, favor peacekeeping over peacemaking and who are concerned about Russia. Stoere's coalition partners from SV, of course, are unabashedly anti-NATO and anti-defense.

Implications for U.S. Policy

116. (C) The decisions made by the GON on the Defense Studies, recommendations on funding, the purchase of new aircraft and on its relations to its neighbors will have a significant impact on Norway's ability and desire to meet NATO commitments and spark a reassessment of Norway's defense policies. We expect Norway's move toward Nordic cooperation and preference for UN mandated peacekeeping missions to remain, even if the current government does not win the 2009 election. This tends combined with a general antipathy to missile defense, efforts to ban cluster munitions, focus on disarmament instead of non-proliferation and reluctance to use its vast energy wealth to fund defense spending open questions regarding Norway's commitment to be a serious and dependable ally. Thus, despite continued close and productive military to military relations, the GON's actions and long-term trends bear watching in NATO and bilaterally. In this atmosphere it is more vital than ever that we speak and act clearly and at senior levels when Norway is an outlier on key issues. Eager to act more independently but loathe to be seen as weakening trans-Atlantic ties, the GON will listen and respond when confronted. Assuming generally common interests and policies, however, would be a mistake. This is not the Norway many remember, and failing to make

clear our objections will encourage more drift. End Comment
WHITNEY